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Some random field notes on three little known Virginia historical sites

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Full of promise,
S. C. H.

SOME RANDOM FIELD NOTES ON THREE LITTLE KNOWN

VIRGINIA HISTORICAL SITES.

Introduction:

In the course of the past seven years, I have believed it worthwhile to spend some of my spare time in visiting various places in the state of Virginia which, while extremely interesting both in themselves and for their historical associations, have for various reasons escaped any widespread notice, even by ^{those} ~~these~~ actively interested in the history of the Old Dominion, and remained almost unvisited. These sites were almost invariably out of the way, badly neglected, and, in cases where buildings or vestiges of them remained, often in daily danger of damage or actual obliteration, whether by vandalism or by natural causes, I therefore embarked upon, and intend to continue, a program of sketching, mapping and describing such of these sites as were accessible to me by the extremely limited means of transportation at my disposal, with the idea that these valuable bits of archaeological evidence might, whatever damage they may subsequently suffer, be recorded and preserved at least as accurate memories. I present herewith some samples of the work of this sort which I have done--all unfortunately only approximately to scale, since it was impossible for me, unaided, and in the very short time allowed for each visit, to make the necessary measurements.

The three sites selected were chosen as being in a sense representative--one of Revolutionary times, one~~x~~ from the years following the War of 1812, and ~~on~~ from the ~~2xix~~ Civil War.

COLUMBIA ARSENAL is located not far from the town of Columbia, Fluvanna Co., Va. It was an arsenal of supply and repair, rather than of manufacture, and derived its main importance from the near-by encampment and supply depot at Point-of-Fork[#] about a mile and a half nearer the town, which lies to the east. The site is the property of a farmer, Mr. Ligford, and is protected by him. The buildings are almost completely ruinous, and overgrown~~mx~~ with brush and trees, which are still further wrecking the field-stone masonry, laid apparently without mortar.

BELLONA ARSENAL was a regularly founded and constituted arsenal of manufactured~~x~~, built 1816-17 and abandoned about forty years later for some reason unknown to me. It included a cannon-foundry, a powder-mill, and a hilltop fort (the only part so far mapped) with high brick walls, loopholes, two sally-ports at each end, and a central compound surrounded by workshops~~s~~, storehouses, barracks, etc. A large portion of the main buildings have been destroyed, probably for the materials, but the remaining part is still imposing, even though in use as cow-

[#] See Col. Simcoe's book on the Queen's Rangers (his Command) for an account of the surprise and destruction of this depot and the arsenal in the course of Arnold's raid of 1781. An interesting ruse was employed.

sheds, barn, etc, A modern house has been built over the old foundation at the south end, and is occupied by the resident farmer; I believe, a tenant.

DREWRY'S BLUFF, having been created ~~maxik~~ one of the state system of battlefield parks, is reasonably safe from further damage. The impermanence of temporary military works being great, no traces of the original revetments, timbering, bombproof shelters, etc. appear on the surface, but it should be easy, from minor excavations, and the many and excellent photographs both of this and exactly similar works of the period, to reconstruct the fortifications on the spot, or make a perfect scale model of them.

KEY TO SKETCH MAP OF COLUMBIA ARSENAL

A. Powder-magazine. The walls are of undressed field-stone, very thick, and extend six or more underground.

a. The owner of the property states that within his memory a partition of stone with an arched doorway divided the magazine and that the arched entrance at "b" was still intact.

B,C,D. Formless mounds of brick and rubble. These are referred to as "barracks".

E. Repair-shed or work-shop.

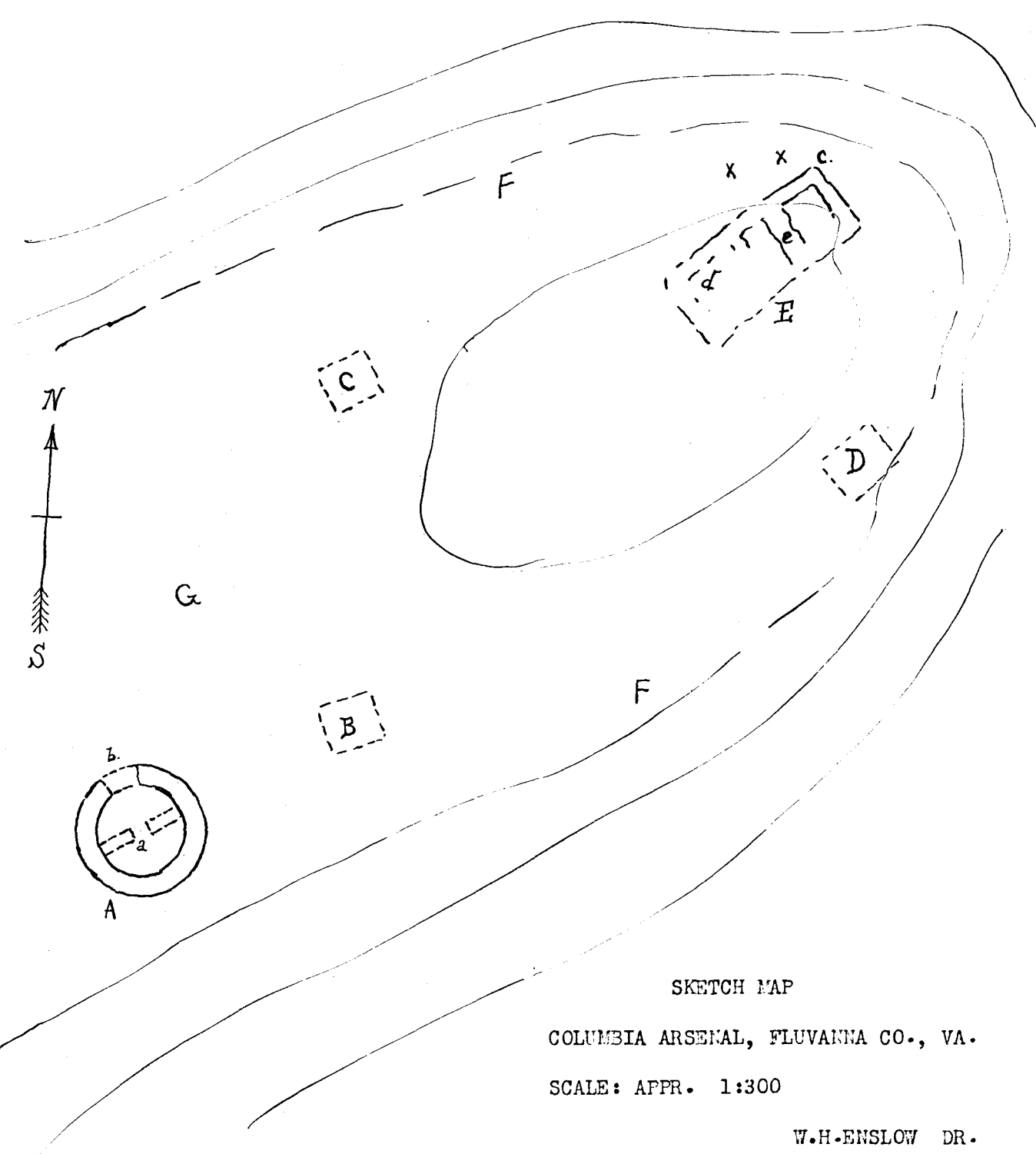
A corner of the wall at "c" is still in fairly good repair, and it is traceable at other points. The section marked "d" is formless.

Brickwork at "e" seems to indicate a hearth or forge.

FF. Approximate line of a breastwork said to have been removed on plowing.

G. Masses of mortar from the building were plowed up at this point.

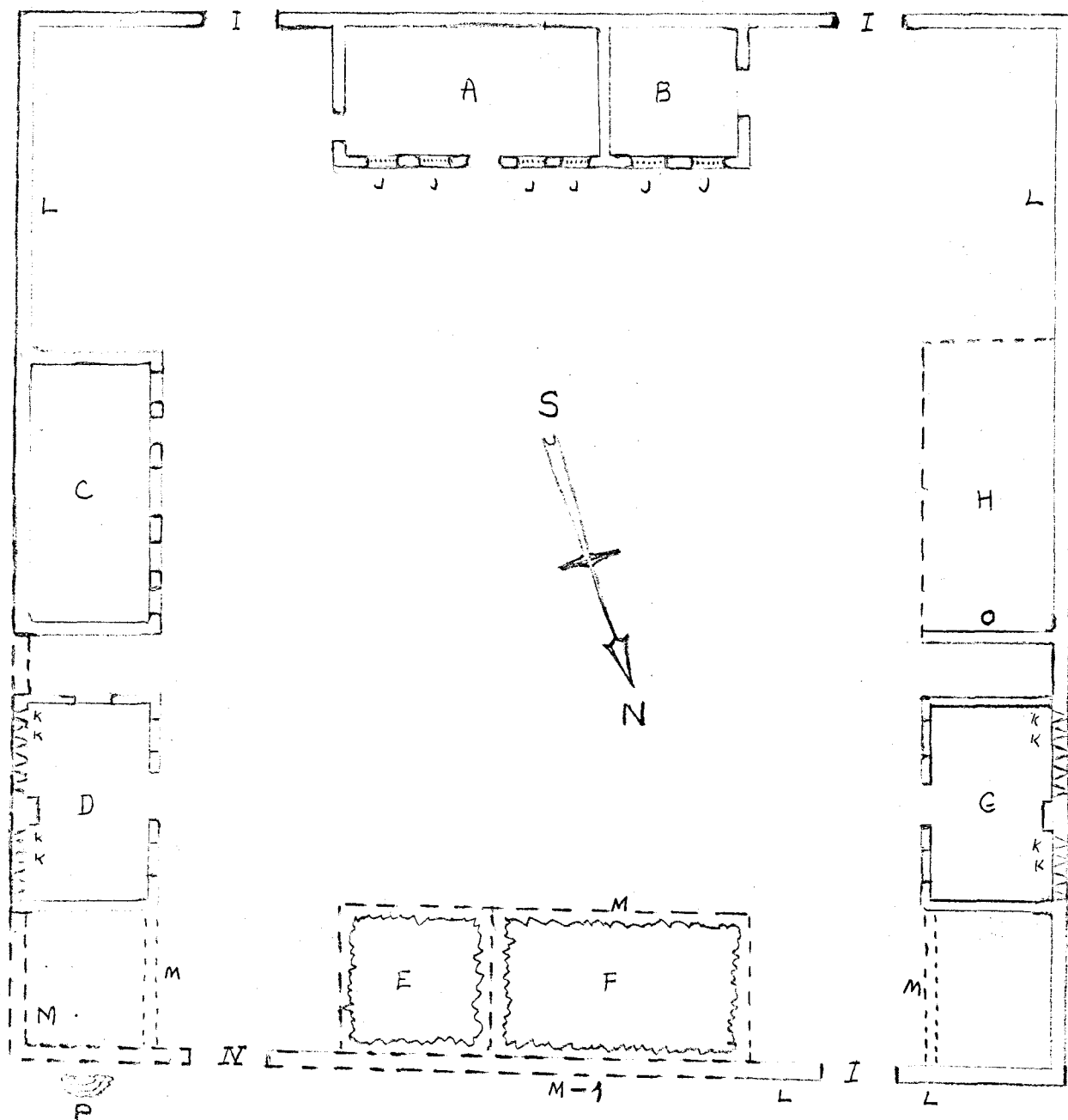
xx. Musket flint and broken frizzen found here.



SKETCH PLAN OF THE BUILDINGS AT BELLONA ARSENAL, VA.

Scale: Approximately 1:240

W.H. ENSLOW DR.



KEY TO SKETCH PLAN OF BELLONA ARSENAL

- A. Modern building on old foundation of squared stone.
- B. Roofless section of same foundation.
- C. Large brick building of three stories. (Drawing shows
second-floor plan.)
- D. Smaller brick building , equipped with loopholes KK.
- E. Ruined section corresponding to B.
- F. Ruined section corresponding to A.
- G. Identical with D on the other side.
- H. The building which would have matched C on this side has been
destroyed. The north wall of its foundation still stands. (O.)
- II. Gates.
- JJ. Barred windows.
- LL. Wall of squared stones, which appears to have been capped by a
wall of brick, considerably higher, but since removed.
- MM. Same wall, where in ruins.
- N. Location of fourth gate cannot be traced clearly.
- P. Semi-circular stepped mound or platform of unknown nature.

2.

THE ORDNANCE DEP'T
OF THE UNITED STATES
ERECTED THESE BUILDINGS

COMMENCED JANUARY 1816. JAMES MADISON PRES'T
FINISHED OCTOBER 1817. JAMES MU
GEORGE BOMFORD L'T COL' OF ORDNANCE
J.D. HAYDEN CAPT' OF ORDNANCE MIL
ROBERT LECKIE MASTER MASON JAMES WILSON
ANDREW FAGAN AND JOSIAH P. PIERCE MASTER CARPENTERS

TABLET PROBABLY
PLACED IN WALL M-1
(SEE PLAN)
SHADED AREA INDICATES
SERIOUS EROSION

A SKETCH MAP TO SHOW THE PRESENT STATE OF THE CONFEDERATE WORKS

AT DREWRY'S BLUFF, VIRGINIA.

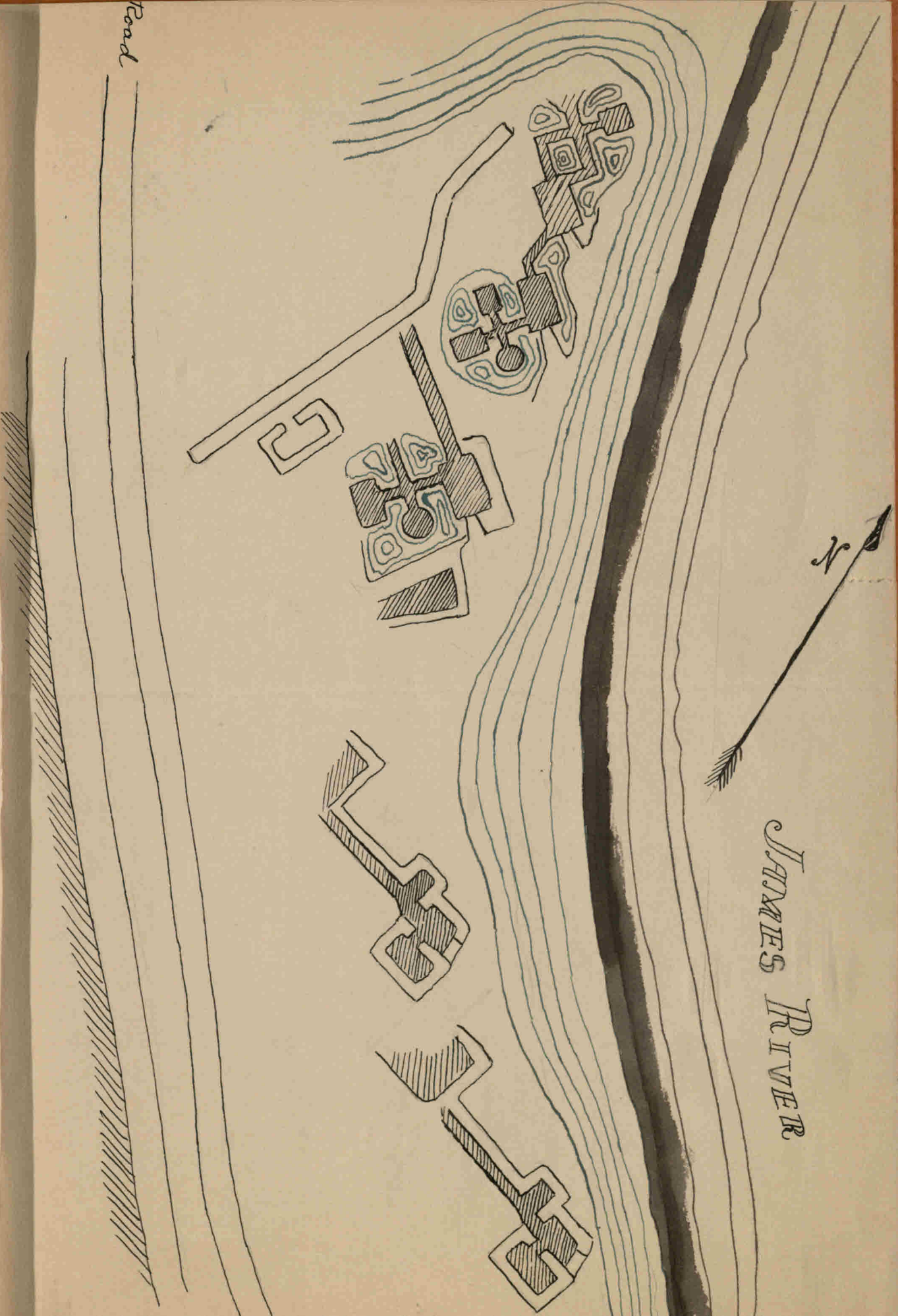
SCALE: APPROXIMATELY 1:480

W. H. ENSLOW DR.

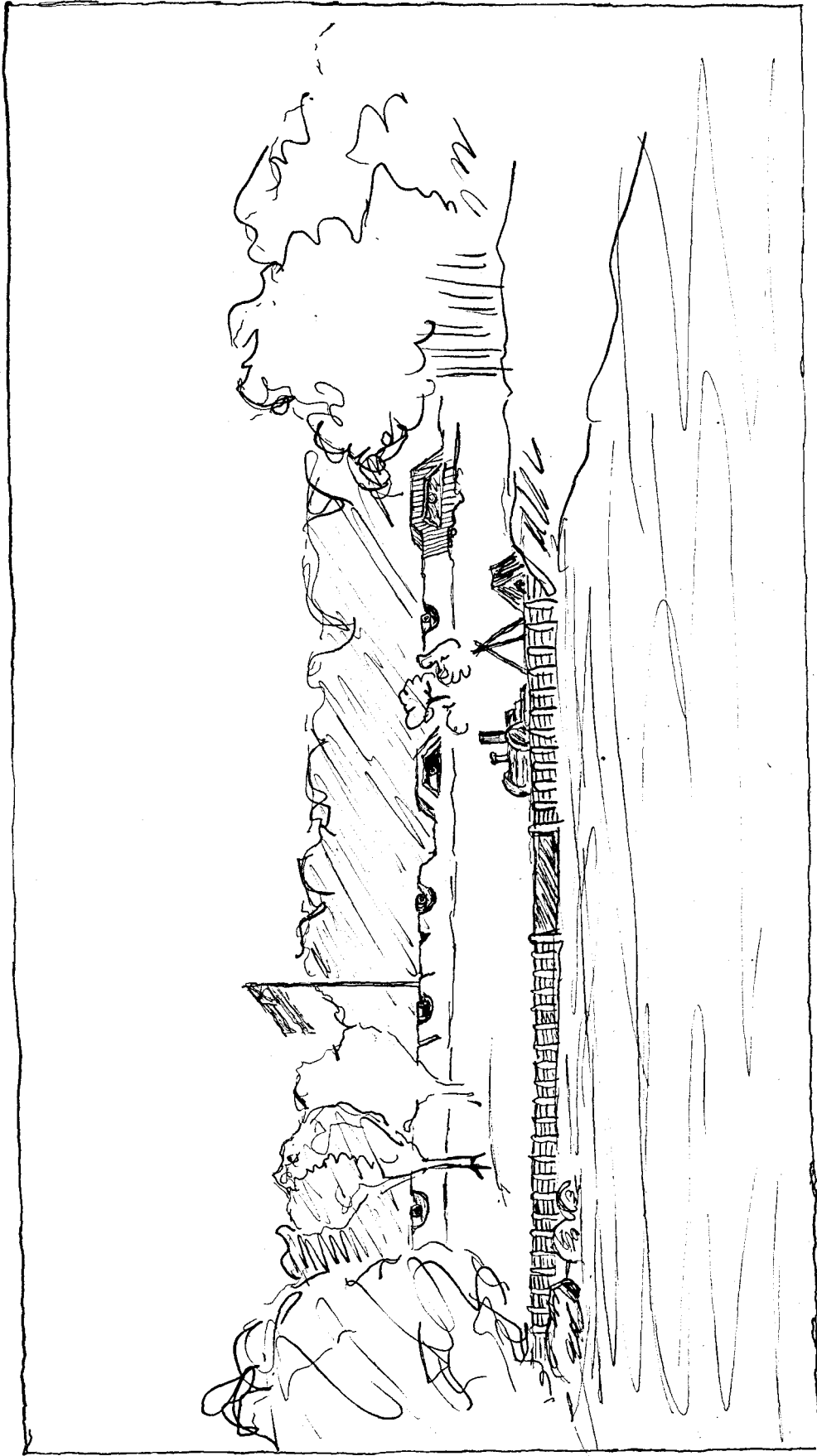
Areas outlined in black indicated elevations of raised works:
shaded areas excavations. Green lines represent contours.

The "Photographic History of the Civil War" contains some excellent photographs of just such works, some of perhaps the very batteries shown here. These emplacements were all apparently intended for casemate-guns, and the openings of the embrasures may be seen to point down the river, whence the Union gunboats came in their occasional upriver raids. An indecisive battle was fought to the south and west of these works, in an attempt to flank and force them by land attack, thus clearing the river for a naval sally on Richmond. (May 15, 1864.)

Road



JAMES RIVER



Works at Drewry's Bluff - River Face -
I naced from a contemporary woodcut.